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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 000210

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, EUR, NEA
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2025

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA'S PRESIDENT, SPEAKER AGREE -- THE END GAME
BEGINS?

REF: 05 NAIROBI 5156

SUMMARY

1. (C) The January 5 agreement signed in Aden between the Somali Transitional President and Speaker of the Parliament can only be welcomed, at least as a reflection of the dialogue that produced it. But such dialogue and agreement may nonetheless herald the end of the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs). The "Aden Declaration" proposes in writing what many Somalis believe to be impossible: that the institution with the broadest legitimacy -- the Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) -- convenes inside Somalia, and by February 4.

2. (C) That these two men could meet, talk, and agree on anything could well be the clearest indication that they are both now completely marginalized within the constituencies they have been seen to lead. Should the TFP in fact convene inside Somalia the USG will be able to tailor its response to the results of the parliamentary session(s). But if TFP members fail to convene, or fail to gather in numbers sufficient to constitute a voting quorum, many TFI leaders themselves will conclude that the TFIs are dead. Meanwhile, famine looms across the country, creating fears that a confluence of hunger, food aid, politics and greed may create a "perfect storm" of humanitarian disaster and armed conflict. END SUMMARY.

THE ADEN DECLARATION

3. (C) After 8 months of a mutual boycott on meeting together, TFI President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed and TFP Speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden met in Aden, Yemen January 3-5. Media hype around the meeting had generated high expectations of a major breakthrough, with the two men rumored to have resolved the question of the seat of the government (TFG), and Yusuf having agreed to instruct all ministers and MPs located at his "interim capital" of Jowhar to relocate to Mogadishu.

4. (C) Thus the final declaration came as a letdown to many observers and Somalis. Although full of conciliatory

language and commitments to work together, the agreement proposed only one concrete action -- that the Parliament, which has not met since March 2004, and never in Somalia, should convene within 30 days inside Somalia, with the venue to be named later. Somalia Watcher conducted a series of meetings with TFP MPs located in Nairobi, NGO staff, international observers and the Speaker of the TFP to gauge reactions to the accord.

SOMALI REACTIONS

14. (C) The consensus among Somali politicians and NGO members was that the challenge of finding a town anywhere in Somalia where a quorum of the TFP members would be safe to meet might well be insurmountable. The southern coastal town of Kismayo, under the relative control of Adan Shire (AKA "Bare Hirale" -- warlord/MP/Minister for Reconstruction Bare and "Chairman" of the Jubba Valley Alliance, Darood/Marehan/Rer Dini clan), and Baidoa, the capital of Bay Region in South Somalia, currently under the supposed control of warlord Mohamed Ibrahim Habsade (Rahanweyn/Mirifle/sideed/Leysan clan), are the current front-runners in the venue speculation game. President Yusuf had in early 2005 proposed to make his interim capital in Baidoa; the Speaker hails from Rahanweyn clan that inhabits Bay Region. Bare Hirale has been conducting an initiative with the Speaker's support to bring the Jowhar and Mogadishu factions together in Kismayo; President Yusuf pushed his Jowhar-based MPs to accept on November 27 convening a meeting of representatives in Kismayo to hash out the details of a parliamentary session in Jowhar.

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15. (C) Somali MPs point out that it may be possible to convene a voting quorum of MPs (at least 139 of 275) in one of these towns -- or even in Jowhar, or in Mogadishu. The problem is that the security situation in each location would define which 139 MPs would be safe to meet there. Somalis express the concern that the discussion has immediately centered on picking a venue where one or another faction or clan can bring the largest number of allied MPs.

16. (C) Beyond the critical question of venue, Somali MPs and NGO staff question whether either Yusuf or Sharif Hassan can in fact "deliver" the MPs supposed to be allied with them. Although some 45 MPs in Mogadishu met on January 7 and strongly endorsed the Aden Declaration, past "Resolutions of the Mogadishu MPs" have brought together up to 109 members. Subsequent press reports lauded the MPs' expressed willingness to begin parliament's work anywhere in the country, including in Jowhar, and told of the strong public reaction in the capital, including street demonstrations in favor of the accord. Notably absent from the January 7 meeting, and totally silent since January 5: warlord/MP/Ministers Mohamed Qanyare Afrah, Muse Sudi Yalahow, Omar Mohammed Mohamud (AKA "Filish"), and Osman Hassan Ali (AKA "Atto"). As for those MPs and Ministers in Jowhar presumed to be loyal to President Yusuf, including the Prime Minister, press reports indicated that they had met and issued a statement on January 8 endorsing the Aden Declaration. The Prime Minister has been personally silent, however.

THE OPTIMISTIC SPEAKER

17. (C) Somalia Watcher met with the TFP Speaker on January 13. The Speaker was ebullient over the Aden Declaration -- but not because he thought it would necessarily result in a session of the parliament. This would be the last chance for the MPs on both sides to either unite, or go back to their towns to wait however long it would take for the next conference designed to try to bring governance to Somalia, the Speaker stated. He pointed out that any MP who refused

to join the Aden initiative would be out of the game. If the Mogadishu warlord-Ministers were to refuse to join, or find a series of excuses to avoid deciding on a venue for the session, he concluded, it would show that the TFIs are truly dead.

18. (C) The Speaker suggested that of the various sites available for the session of parliament, Baidoa would be the easiest for him to sell. He noted that it was an area where he has considerable personal influence; it is currently under control of a fellow Mirifle clansman, Mohamed Ibrahim Habsade, who himself is neither Minister nor MP; and President Yusuf had sought to name the town his interim capital the year before. The Speaker expressed the view that, having put his security in the hands of the Mogadishu warlords since June 2005, it was time for them to give their trust to him. (NOTE: As of January 17, Kismayo seems well off the table, given an outbreak of vicious combat on January 15 between forces loyal to Bare Hirale and those of a fellow Marehan clansman and JVA advisor, Abdi Egal. The reason for the fighting is unclear -- most observers believe it to be a leadership struggle within the JVA, although others point to control over a port town like Kismayo as being a profitable venture when large-scale food aid deliveries are expected. END NOTE.)

19. (C) Sharif Hassan asked that the USG consider a concrete diplomatic contribution to the process of convening a session of parliament. The Speaker speculated that the Mogadishu warlord-Ministers' point of objection would be a perceived threat of outside military intervention -- either covert or overt -- from Ethiopia, especially if Baidoa were chosen as the venue. Noting his full understanding that the USG could not provide a guarantee of any sort, he nonetheless stated that an indication from Washington of our desire to see a successful session of parliament free of interference would be a valuable card for him to play with

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the Mogadishu "heavyweights".

NGOS -- HUNGER IS A FACTOR

10. (C) Somalia Watcher met with USAID's principal implementing partner for food deliveries into Somalia, CARE, Int'l, to discuss the political impact of potentially disastrous food deficits now expected to last through at least July. CARE staff pointed out that Baidoa is located directly in one of the hungriest areas of Somalia, raising the specter of conducting politics in the middle of famine. CARE staff also pointed out that the mercurial warlord/Governor of Middle Shabelle and Jowhar, Mohamed Omar Habeb (AKA "Dheere"), has militia roaming well into Hiiraan region. Dheere might seek to challenge the established food shippers who would seek to move stocks into deficit areas if the demand-driven inflation becomes sufficient for him to see profit in the risk. Although CARE staff believed the Somali contractor they have long relied upon for deliveries -- the "businessman" Mohamed Deylaf of Al-Towfiq Shipping -- is militarily strong enough to face down most rivals, a combination of hunger and price rises could be a challenge even for him.

11. (C) CARE's staff, as well as those from Somali NGOs, agreed that some elements of a "perfect storm" -- hunger, disputed political authority, competing donors, UN mismanagement, opportunities for windfall profits -- were in place that brought fears of a repeat of the famine and civil war of the early 1990s. However, most felt that for the moment, the military and clan strength of the small number of food transporters made a significant difference from the situation 15 years ago, donors and UN agencies had not Somali partners on which to call for food deliveries, leaving convoys at the mercy of marauding militias and warlords, finally leading the the USG intervention to

protect assistance deliveries.

COMMENT:

¶12. (C) The Speaker's rather bizarre optimism was striking, given that it was based on the assumption that the situation is moving toward an end game -- either the TFIs would begin to function, or the Somali people would call it a day and move on with their lives. He clearly preferred the former, but was as clearly preparing himself for the latter. Sharif Hassan has never had any illusions as to his relative power among the "heavyweight" MPs and warlords -- he knows he has only his personal credibility as a tool to influence others, as opposed to arms in the hands of warlords, and money in the hands of the Jowhar politicians. He seemed oddly saddened when he suggested that the only reason President Yusuf would finally agree to meet with him was because the President's former patrons in Rome had joined with the PM to push him to the margins. (REFTEL noted Italy's decision to pursue policy objectives through the PM, calling Yusuf "yesterday's man".)

¶13. (C) The "perfect storm" scenario that would lead to fighting on a scale not seen since the early 1990s seems somewhat overblown at this point in the humanitarian crisis. That private Somali transporters are militarily strong and independent of the current TFI political wrangling bodes relatively well for the probability that food stocks, already in very short supply and at risk of piracy, might not be vulnerable to the kind of attack, confiscation, and/or destruction that turned a similar drought in 1991 into a full-blown famine. We urge caution, however: as data on the seriousness of the drought become more complete, each additional fact learned points to a humanitarian situation worse, rather than better, than initially feared.

BELLAMY